

THE SUPPRESSION OF VICE.
A Letter from Mr. Anthony Comstock
in Reply to his Critics.

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR THE SUPPRESSION
OF VICE, 150 BROAD ST., DEC. 1, 1887.
To the Editor of the Bloomfield Citizen:

An eminent gentleman, a resident of your town, has kindly brought me a copy of your paper of Nov. 26th, containing an editorial entitled "Anthony Comstock." Very naturally you have taken your cue and argued from the tone and expression of the Daily Press. The Daily Press in the main, have based their attacks of ridicule, misrepresentation and abuse upon gross misstatements published in what has been I believe justly termed, a "nasty evening paper."

One of the evening papers published a lot of pictures, and claimed that these pictures were the ones that were the subject of complaint in the courts, upon which certain gentlemen had been arrested. It will be sufficient to state that not one of the pictures thus represented are the exhibits upon which the warrant and complaint were based.

Not stopping to discuss whether all of the works of some of the unsavory authors you name in your paper are proper for the youth of this country to read; nor disputing that some of the works of these authors are sold by reputable firms under the restriction of a high price to students only, or literary gentlemen to make up their libraries. I simply ask the attention of yourself and readers to a few plain facts in the matter, and then let those who have children in your town say whether or no I am a "crank," or whether I have meddled in that which does not concern me, and concern more than all—every child in the land.

The gentleman who wrote the editorial in your paper may be an exceedingly learned man, but there is one thing he seems to have entirely omitted. He says: "When Mr. Comstock first began he accomplished much good by suppressing vulgar and obscene pictures of the pen and pencil which were sold and bought only because they were nasty." This was well and with the suppression of this sort of stuff the object of the statute is attained.

There is a higher authority on the "object of the statute" of this State than the author of that editorial; and I quote from the celebrated case of "People vs. August Mueller," in the words of the General Term of the Supreme Court, who affirmed the judgment of conviction in that case, Mueller had been tried and convicted in the Oyer & Terminer Court, of New York City, for selling obscene pictures. Eight of these pictures were conceded to have been photographs of works of art exhibited in the Salons of Paris, and one of them was proved to have been exhibited in the Centennial at Philadelphia. The Court says:

"The object of the law was to protect public morals especially of that class of the community which is not so completely formed as to be protected against the lewd effects of the pictures, photographs and publications prohibited."

As some of these pictures which you seem to defend in your editorial were duplicates of some of the pictures that Mueller was convicted for selling in 1884, it will be interesting at least to your readers to know what the opinion of the General Term of the Supreme Court was in reference to those pictures. Having had the pictures before them, they say:

"They are photographs of nude females in a variety of attitudes and postures which the jury might very well, and naturally would have found to be indecent and obscene in their character—ordinarily they would be so pronounced, although they would not exert the same demoralizing and sensual effects upon all persons alike. Their judgment would be the same that these photographs and pictures would tend to promote vicious and sensual misconduct among the less educated members of the community, especially to those whose judgment and experience were not sufficient to control the impulses of their passion."

It will thus be seen that notwithstanding your interpretation of the law, that the Supreme Court of this State by a unanimous decision differs from you. This case was carried to the Court of Appeals, and the Court of Appeals, by a unanimous decision, says: "We find, no error in the record."

That your readers may clearly comprehend the fact that because these photographs are photographs of works of art they may be also obscene, lewd and indecent, within the statute, I desire to quote a word from the Court of Appeals, (reported in the N. Y. Reports, page 411.)

"The facts that the original pictures of which the photographs were copies had been exhibited in the Salons of Paris was admitted by the Prosecution, and it was proved that one of them had been publicly exhibited in Philadelphia. But this did not in any way affect the finding by the jury that the photographs were obscene and indecent. It is not impossible certainly that the public exhibition of indecent pictures may have been permitted in Paris or Philadelphia, but the fact that a picture had been publicly exhibited would not necessarily determine its character as decent or indecent."

If you will go back to 1726, to the case of King vs. Curl, tried under the Common Law in England, you will find the principle that "The Courts are the guardians of the public morals," and "That which tends to corrupt public morals is indecent," clearly laid down. If you will follow the cases from that date down to the present time, you will find that all the courts in England and America have announced and approved of this principle.

The test of obscenity has been clearly laid down in the English Courts. That test has been approved of in every case tried since in the courts of this country, and is as follows:

"Whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt the minds of persons open to such immoral influences into whose hands a publication of this sort may come."

It will thus be seen, that you in common with the Press generally, fail to recognize the all-important question of public morals; fail to distinguish between a work of art and a photograph which strips a painting of all that makes it a work of art, you fail to discern the effect of this libel on art when placed in the open market at a low figure, thus bringing it within easy reach of the young of this country.

In the case in which you are so free with your criticism, it will be interesting to you to know that some fifteen or twenty persons have been convicted for the sale of similar pictures; and the parties recently arrested not only were warned,

but knew of the conviction of some of these men. They also had a copy of the law served upon them, but still they continued to sell and import these pictures. You forget another thing—that this is a question of the proper enforcement of the law, and that the rich man has no more privileges under the law than the poor man. If there is anything more abhorrent than to try, condemn and pass judgment upon another without a knowledge of the facts, it is to set up a standard of justice which only punishes the poor, and allows a man in a more favored position to go unwhipped of justice.

Another thing I beg to emphasize in your midst is that there is not a boy or girl in the town of Bloomfield whose moral purity and character is not of more importance to the community than all of the photographs that have ever been imported from France, and all of French Art of the character that we are fighting against.

I cannot but admire your candor and frankness, and I hope you will extend it to me, at least, by granting me space for this defense even though I have been condemned and sentenced by the Press generally as a "crank" and "without judgment."

Very Respectfully,
ANTHONY COMSTOCK,
Secy.

To the Musical Public of Bloomfield.
Editor, Bloomfield Citizen:

For the last time we would call attention to the fact that the evening of the Grand Classical Concert given by the students singing society "Polyhymnia" is near at hand. On Tuesday, December 6th, this great musical event of the season will take place. Having full confidence in the ability of the public of Bloomfield to duly appreciate good music, we feel assured that the undertaking will meet with general approval and will also be crowned with financial success, enabling the students to present to the seminary their Christmas gift in the form of a handsome organ. The students rely upon the cheerful support which has been granted them so freely on former occasions by their many kind friends. All will readily see that the possession of an organ will be a great benefit to the seminary in general, helping the students in a proper rendition of the difficult German chorals, and thereby contributing greatly towards heightening the edifying influence of their morning and evening prayers. May all who are convinced of the necessity of bringing the great masses of Germans who come to this land under the influence of the Gospel of Christ, show a kind heart and lend a helping hand to this company of thirty-two students, who are devoting their lives to this great and holy though very difficult calling. Before inserting the full programme, we would now express our heartfelt thanks to the Misses A. Colfax and M. Davis, altos; and Mrs. F. J. Camp, soprano, for their great kindness in volunteering to us their highly esteemed services. We are willing to let the programme stand, on its own merits, and would therefore publish it now in the columns of this valuable paper. It is as follows:

PART I.
1. Orchestra: (a) Reve Apres, Le Bal, (Ed. Bonstet.) (d) Herzen-dieb; Caprice, (Wilh. Popp.) European Society.
2. Soprano Solo: Waiting; (Millard.) Miss. M. Bouscine, New York.
3. Cither Club: Frankfurter Cither Quartet-March; Amicitia Cither Club, New York.
4. Octette: Bill of Fare; (Zoellner.) Polyhymnia."
5. Piano Solo: Cachemire Caprice; (J. Raff.) Prof. W. C. Pederit.
6. Quartet: The Dreamy See; (V. Mohring.) Miss M. Bouscine, Miss E. Oerter, Mr. O. Klose, Mr. Albert Bruchlos.

7. Flute Solo: Rapsodie Americaine; (Terschak.) Mr. D. Wilkinson, Newark.
PART II.
1. Cither Club: Selection; Amicitia Cither Club, New York.
2. Alto Solo: Where the Linden Bloom; (Dudley Buck.) Miss E. Oerter, New York.
3. Grand Chorus: Te Deum Lauds; (Richard Wagner.) Choir of the German Presbyterian Church of Rahway, N. J., and the "Polyhymnia."

4. Violin Solo: Concerto Primo; (De Boret.) Master P. W. Geyer, N. Y.
5. Orchestra: Selection; Ruddygore.
6. Flute Solo: Columbus; (Terschak.) Mr. D. Wilkinson.
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Phoenix Hose Company's Entertainment.

A large audience gathered in Library Hall Thursday evening to hear the Georgia Jubilee Singers. From the first to the last vigorous applause followed every performance. The singing was pronounced excellent. Mr. Blackwell, the funny man, made friends with the autocratic gallery girls, who evinced a disposition to exact more than that gentleman was willing to give for a quarter. In the role of Mr. Piper he was called out four times. A burlesque called "Uncle Tom's Cabin Played in Five Minutes" caused a great deal of merriment. Mr. Chas. A. Asbury handled the banjo in an unusually skillful manner, receiving a triple encore. The earnestness displayed by Cassey Ouley made her a favorite with the audience.

Considerable commotion ensued in the intermission, when Manager Morton took occasion to thank the audience for their presence and attention. He announced that the troupe would soon visit Bloomfield again, and with that a great many supposed that the entertainment was over, and immediately began to vacate their seats. When they were informed of their mistake they resumed their places amid wild applause. The entertainment concluded with a Southern plantation scene which was full of life, music and fun. The audience then dispersed, expressing themselves well satisfied with the evening's amusement.

The facts that the original pictures of which the photographs were copies had been exhibited in the Salons of Paris was admitted by the Prosecution, and it was proved that one of them had been publicly exhibited in Philadelphia. But this did not in any way affect the finding by the jury that the photographs were obscene and indecent. It is not impossible certainly that the public exhibition of indecent pictures may have been permitted in Paris or Philadelphia, but the fact that a picture had been publicly exhibited would not necessarily determine its character as decent or indecent."

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